

Documents on Diplomacy: Lessons

"The Kremlin Design" and NSC-68

"The Kremlin design seeks to impose order among nations by means which would destroy our free and democratic system." NSC-68

"...that the cold war is in fact a real war in which the survival of the free world is at stake." NSC-68

"Our position as the center of power in the free world places a heavy responsibility upon the United States for leadership. We must organize and enlist the energies and resources of the free world in a positive program for peace which will frustrate the Kremlin design for world domination by creating a situation in the free world to which the Kremlin will be compelled to adjust." NSC-68

Standard: I. Culture
 II. Time, Continuity, and Change
 III. People, Places, and Environments
 IV. Individual Development and Identity
 V. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
 VI. Power, Authority, and Governance
 VII. Production, Distribution, and Consumption
 VIII. Science, Technology, and Society
 IX. Global Connections
 X. Civic Ideals and Practices

Grade Level: 9–12

Objectives: The student will:
 ● Analyze the document, NSC–68
 ● Determine the foreign policy options of the United States in the early Cold War
 ● Evaluate decisions made by President Harry S Truman
 ● Portray key foreign policy decisionmakers

Time: 2 class periods

Materials: Documents: 1950 Excerpts from NSC–68

Resources: Readings: NSC–68 (background, if necessary)
 The Early Cold War Diplomatic Terms and Historical Events
 Image: NSC–68 Title Page

Materials: Index Cards

Procedures:

Setting the Stage

President Harry S Truman requested that the National Security Council (NSC)—consisting of the State Department, Defense Department, CIA, and other relevant agencies—conduct a policy review and make recommendations for the future course of the United States in the Cold War. The *Top Secret* report, known by its number—NSC-68—was delivered to Truman on April 7, 1950. The President did not immediately accept the report because he wanted cost estimates and more specific information. However, the invasion of South Korea by North Korea on June 25, 1950, changed the atmosphere inside the White House. NSC-68 was signed by President Truman on September 30, 1950. It was not declassified until 1975.

The Kremlin, as referenced repeatedly in NSC-68, is used as a *metonym* to refer to the government of the U.S.S.R. Kremlin, literally translated, means “Russian citadel.” It is a fortified complex in Moscow containing such familiar landmarks as Red Square, Saint Basil’s Cathedral, and several palaces, cathedrals, and the official residence of the President of the country.

- 1.** Divide the document, NSC-68, into sections for students’ use. They will read different parts of the document.
 - a.** Analysis—Read by everyone or summarized by teacher
 - b.** Sections II, III, IV
 - c.** Section V
 - d.** Sections VI, VII
 - e.** Conclusions and Recommendations
- 2.** Create four groups to address the specific sections. Distribute the NSC-68 sections to the groups.
- 3.** All students now are members of the advisory group asked by President Truman to report on future U.S. foreign policy options. It is their task to “brief” the President on the NSC-68 report. He has not read or heard the details of NSC-68. It is the task of each group to explain their section(s).

A briefing means they should reduce the content to key points. The President will read the report later. The groups are providing highlights only. However, they should be prepared to answer questions from President Truman.
- 4.** Select a student to portray President Truman (must be familiar with the document beforehand for classroom purposes) or the teacher may officiate as the President.
- 5.** Introduce vocabulary words from the document prior to reading. These words are defined in *Section X: The Early Cold War Diplomatic Terms and Historical Events*. Discuss the vocabulary with students. Have them assess the use of the terms in NCS-68.

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| a. superpowers | h. isolationism |
| b. containment | i. conventional arms |
| c. fission bomb | j. rearmament |
| d. thermonuclear bomb | k. deterrent |
| e. satellite states | l. appeasement |
| f. Iron Curtain | m. hydrogen bomb |
| g. political purges | n. nuclear weapons |

- 6.** Provide each group with an index card. They are to put all of their information on ONE CARD ONLY (emphasizing this is a briefing for the President.)
- 7.** Allow time for students to read their assigned sections of NSC-68 and then to record key information on the index cards.
- 8.** Conduct the briefing with each group sharing its information with President Truman. Allow time for questions from the President.
- 9.** Write or project these foreign policy options on the board:
 - a.** Isolationism
 - b.** Containment
 - c.** War
 - d.** Diplomatic efforts to negotiate
 - e.** Rapid build-up of political, economic, and military strength
- 10.** Have students discuss which of these options was recommended by the NSC-68 report. Was more than one option actually included? If so, which ones?

Extension Activities:

- 1.** Have students consider the impact of these events on the writing of NSC-68 and President Truman's ultimate signing of the document.
 - a.** Czech coup 1948
 - b.** Berlin Blockade 1948
 - c.** Soviet test of atomic bomb 1949
 - d.** Mao Zedong created the People's Republic of China
 - e.** Joseph McCarthy's actions
- 2.** Examine the declassified NSC-68 cover page. What information is revealed by this page? Why did declassification occur in 1975? What was different about U.S. foreign policy at that juncture of history? ■